Burdett lashes out at Saugus opponent

Alleges Sigman is allowed to bend rules by officials

By DAVID SHEFTER
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Steve Burdett knew what he did was wrong. And he understood the consequences.

But at the time, revenge was the only thing that crossed his mind. Frustrated by what he believed was a poor decision by race officials, Burdett decided he would take action into his own hands June 10 at Saugus Speedway.

So the Canyon Country driver took his car out of the pits and purposely slammed into Gary Sigman's vehicle, knocking him into the infield.

Sigman, who was in second place at the time, wound up finishing 12th in the 40-lap Main and was passed by current Sportsman division leader Will Harper.

Burdett's action, however, cost him a 12-week suspension from racing his car at Saugus.

The retaliation came as a result of what Burdett thought was some rough driving on Sigman's part, a tactic which he said is used quite often by the Carson driver.

After a second yellow caution flag, Burdett was alone in second place behind Dave Phipps. When racing resumed, Sigman closed in on him, and on turn 4 of lap 26 deliberately crashed into his car, Burdett said.

"Sigman turned left and crashed right into my rear quarter panel," Burdett said.

But it wasn't until Burdett was having his car towed out of the track that the controversy began. Instead of going to the back of the pack — which is the general rule when cars collide — Sigman maintained his position and moved into second place.

So when Burdett got back to the pits, his crew suggested that he go after Sigman for not complying with the rules. They took off the metal strips which had come loose and Burdett returned to the track when lap 38 was about to commence.

He waited for Sigman to come into focus and banged into him along the front straightaway.

"I know what I did was wrong," Burdett said. "But I wouldn't have done it if Sigman had gone to the back of the pack. I got a standing ovation from the crowd and about 200 people came up to me after the race to congratulate me. Most people asked me why I didn't put Gary into the wall."

Other race drivers were also convinced that Sigman's maneuver wasn't legal.

"It's not just that one incident," said Canyon Country resident Rick Crow, who races in the Street Stock class. "He took out Larry Krieger the week before."

Sigman, who, according to Burdett, blamed the accident on Keith Spangler, could not be reached for comment.

The man in charge of making such decisions, Monte Monteleone, the speedway's chief steward, was observing the races that night from lap 3.

He said when the melee occurred, a clear-cut decision could not be made until the conclusion of the race.

"I would have had to make a decision from turn 3, which wouldn't have been fair," Monteleone said. "My hands were tied. I can't watch everything that goes on. That's why we have race officials in the corners to watch for oil spills and water and things of that nature. We were also running behind because there had been several crashes that night and the promoter wanted the show to get over. That's why we waited until the end.

"We got all the corner people together with the starter and questioned some of the drivers. And the decision we came up with is that it was a racing incident. You can't please everybody in these types of decisions."

Burdett, however, has the incident on videotape and he says it clearly illustrates Sigman's wrongdoing. But Monteleone said video is only utilized to determine a photo finish, not in cases of crashes.

"The problem with video is that you can have several different angles that show several different causes," Monteleone said. "Yes, I've seen the video and even sent it to Daytona (NASCAR headquarters). And they'll say the same thing I've said, that it was a racing incident. You can quote me on that."

But Burdett says the decision was totally political, claiming that Sigman buys ads in the program and "kisses up" to the officials.

"Sigman, by far, is the one driver that is allowed to get away with everything," Burdett alleged. "He's permitted to bend the rules and they just let him get away with it. There is definite favoritism towards him from the officials."

Added Crow: "The decision was totally political. I'm not saying it's right to go out and get revenge. All we want is for the officials to be fair. In my opinion, why weren't both drivers black-flagged (disqualified)? And why wasn't Burdett black-flagged when he came back on the track? Everyone knew what he was going to do."

Meanwhile, Burdett has written a formal letter to Ed Cox, NASCAR's West Coast competition administrator, but has yet to receive a response.